

Statement of Congressman John Conyers, Jr.
Committee on the Judiciary
Hearing on the "Anti-Terrorism Act"
September 24, 2001

Our nation is still coming to grips with the tragic events of September 11. Thousands of families have been waiting in a silent vigil for almost two weeks, hoping for good news about missing loved ones.

The country is unified in this fight against the terrorists and so is the Congress. Today, we are here to review the Attorney General's emergency request for new authorities to combat terrorism.

I am gratified to report that the Minority Leader has indicated to me that the Speaker is in no hurry to move this bill hastily and recognizes that this Committee needs to take its time and do its job right.

We must also be careful not to bite off more than we can chew. Past experience has taught us that today's weapon against terrorism may be tomorrow's weapon against law abiding Americans.

Just as I have seen an inspiring unity in the American people, I have seen other signs that are less encouraging. Hate crimes are on the rise and are reaching epidemic levels against Arab-Americans. We've also heard disturbing stories of ethnic profiling occurring at our nation's airports and abusive behavior by our own FBI. Our job is to make sure that these precious civil rights and civil liberties are not turned into another casualty of the terrorists.

And, while the Department of Justice has proposed some useful changes to current anti-terrorism law, numerous provisions are crafted far too broadly.

If we quickly cast aside our constitutional form of government then the enemy will not be the terrorists, it will be us. The terrorists will have accomplished in a "slow burn" what the fires of the World Trade Center could not – the destruction of our democratic form of government.

So, today, I want to urge all of the Members of the Committee to work through this issue in this time of tragedy in a bipartisan manner. These are difficult issues that require balance and caution. We are all motivated by our love of country, both the need to protect it from attack and the need to protect it from intrusions on its citizens civil liberties.